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Trucage and the Film

Christian Metz

Translated by Françoise Meltzer

1. The Concept of Image Track

The visual portion of a synchronized-sound film (or the totality of a silent film) corresponds to what is called the "image track." In spite of this term, the image track is not comprised of images alone but also includes two elements of a different nature. First, an entire collection of written statements and dialogues, such as the title of the film, production credits, the words "The End," the intertitles of silent movies, the subtitles of sound films shown abroad in the original version, scattered information like "Twenty Years Later," and the like. Second, that which is the object of this study: various optical effects obtained by the appropriate manipulations, the sum of which constitutes *visual*, but not *photographic*, material. A "wipe" or a "fade" are visible things, but they are not images or representations of a given object. A "blurred focus" or "accelerated motion" are not photographs in themselves, but modifications of photographs. The "visible material of transitions," to quote Etienne Souriau,¹ is always extradiegetic. Whereas the images of films have objects for referents, the optical effects have, in some fashion, the images themselves, or at least those to which they are contiguous in the succession, as referents.

The Marxist theorist Béla Balázs has remarked that these optical processes appear to signal a direct intervention of the film maker into

The word "*trucage*" usually translates as "trick photography" in the singular and "special effects" in the plural. But Metz places many terms, including these, under the rubric of *trucage*, and I am therefore retaining the French word. [Translator's note]

1. "Les Grands Caractères de l'univers filmique," in *L'Univers filmique* (Paris, 1953), p. 19.

the narrative,² whereas photographs (even when put into motion, as they are in film) express the author's point of view only through the development of a "story." The very manner in which the story unfolds reveals—and simultaneously conceals, *envelops*, in short—the author's stance with respect to the events presented. It is this effect of envelopment which was intimated in the concept of *mise en scène*,* also including the structure of events, montage, camera movement, and the like. In short, this is a question of a certain kind of rapport between ideology and the manifest content of a filmic text. With a fade-out, on the other hand, that rapport is displaced, and the film maker (or, to some extent, the camera) seems to speak in his own name: "absolute filmic effects" and "expressive technique of the camera," concludes Béla Balázs.³

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that not all of these optical effects are obtained during the shooting; some are produced in the laboratory. The former are the result of *camera* manipulation, the latter of *celluloid* manipulation.⁴ This is the first possible division inside "process effects."

2. Trucages and Syntactic Signals

It is not the only division. One can equally distinguish between those manipulations resulting in what are termed (and it is a term which I shall retain, for the sake of expediency) syntactic markings, the most promi-

**Mise en scène* is used in English because of its development by André Bazin, who defines it as a cinematic quality contrasted to montage. Although the term means "theatre staging," Bazin uses it to mean all of the plastic elements of image, both still (costumes, sets, lighting, etc.) and moving (blocking, composition). [Translator's note]

2. *Theory of the Film* (London, 1952), p. 144.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

4. In "Technique et idéologie," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 239 (1971), pp. 7–8, Jean Louis Comolli correctly observes that the entirety of cinematographic technology should not be reduced to the camera alone.

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ment of which are "punctuation marks," and those manipulations which constitute *trucages*: backwards motion, accelerated motion, slow motion, multiple exposures with matte and countermatte allowing for the display, on the same frame, of two "copies" of the same actor engaged in conversation with "himself."

The concept of *trucage* as presented here must not be confused with the "special effects" of which studio technicians speak. Preoccupied with the practical problems of their craft, technicians consider as special all those effects which they must create specially and which demand, in addition to the normal work of filming, a small, particular technique. There are, in fact, "special effects men" in studios—their names occasionally figure in the credits. Thus loosely defined, the rubric of special effects will obviously form, for the semiologist, a heteroclitical group.** Jean Louis Comolli is quite right in remarking⁵ that the notions of technicians—who sometimes have a *professional*, and therefore corporate, personality—cannot automatically be considered as theoretical concepts. Each case must be examined separately.

3. *Taxemes and Exponents*

In the case which concerns us, the introduction of a third consideration will allow us to dissect the realm of optical effects differently. If the *position of the signifier* is considered with respect to the perceptible succession of the film (= distributional criterion), the fade-out will be in opposition to all other methods. In fact, it alone occupies a more or less lengthy segment of the image track. When a fade-out is followed by a fade-in, for a brief moment the only visual element offered to the spectator is the black rectangle. Here, the optical effect is in itself a filmic *taxeme*, in the sense of Louis Hjelmslev. An indivisible segment in the sequence, it monopolizes the screen for an instant.

What defines all process-effects, we have seen, is a kind of *divergence from "photographicity."* With the fade-out, that divergence rests in the very fact that the film, for an instant, offers no photograph for viewing. The situation is different with other optical effects. Indeed, superimpositions or dissolves consist in superimposing two units of perception, both photographic in nature. Certainly, their superimposition is not in itself a

**For an alternative view on this problem, see Gerald Mast's *Film/Cinema/Movie* (New York, 1977). Mast suggests that there is no single word capable of covering all the categories which Metz will include under the label "*trucage*." Some of the effects pertain to the differences between camera speed and projection speed, others to lenses and filters used during the shooting, still others to effects of film processing and printing. [Translator's note]

photograph, which is what defines the divergence here. But at no time will the spectator see the optical effect *only*; he will see images *affected* by a special effect, like a type of semiological exponent. The process is no longer a taxeme; it is the exponent of one or more taxemes, it is suprasegmental. It refers to an image with which it is simultaneous, whereas the fade-out refers to images coming immediately before or after it.

In contrast to the fade-out, a taxeme process, the processes of exponents are fairly numerous: the iris, the wipe, special lenses, blurred focus, backwards motion, accelerated or slow motion, the use of a freeze frame, dissolves, superimposition, overexposure, split screen (several photos at the same time, the screen being divided into a certain number of "scenes," but by juxtaposition and without superimposition)—as many effects as assume (and affect) one or more photographs.

Nevertheless, some of these allow for variables in which they become (so to speak) quasi taxemes. This is the case with the iris (irising in or out). If we consider that part of the image which remains visible to the end, it is an exponential process, the exponent here being the black halo which closes on that which we continue to see. But if we consider that invading black, in itself soliciting attention, the iris reveals itself to be related to the fade-out—which in fact replaced, in the history of the cinema, most of its functions. And it is, to a certain point, the iris as such which occupies the corresponding segment of the film (or at least of the image track, with which this study is concerned, leaving the sound element aside).

Similar remarks can be made about the wipe, in which one sees two images one of which seems to be pushing the other off the screen (at which point the effect produced is like the exponent of these two images). The very fact of this curious eviction can, by logical extension, become the essential viewed subject as long as it is not completed. This is especially the case in one of the variants of the wipe in which a large white strip of fairly great width sweeps across the screen, pushing the new image in and the previous one out. This effect was used, for example, in Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones* (England, 1963), and tends to make the transition itself an autonomous segment by virtue of the perceptual attack of the extradiegetic material used. This impression is strengthened when the white strip does not move parallel to the vertical sides of the screen but rather adopts some more imaginative itinerary across the textual fabric, such as a radius circularly sweeping the screen from a central point. (Again, in *Tom Jones*, such processes correspond to a deliberate distancing, and are the cinematographic equivalent of a certain jocular style peculiar to eighteenth-century novels.) On the other hand, in *The Seven Samurai* by Akira Kurosawa (Japan, 1954), and in many other films, there appears a variant of the wipe which is noticeably different: a sort of vague shadow passes over the screen laterally, separating (without being perceived) the image which is "departing"

from that which is "entering." Such a wipe is exponential to both images, and thus returns us to the general case.

If the optical effects are rarely taxemes, it is because the purpose of film is to produce images treated in one manner or another and not (as is implicit in the definition of a process-taxeme) to produce something other than images. I will try to show later that in classical cinema the method judged to be optimal for special effects is that which permits assigning them, through a division of belief and denial of perception, *both* to the diegesis and to the statement. The process-taxeme is from the start very noticeably outside the diegesis, and therefore partakes of speech in action. The fade-out fulfills the often imperious demands for clarity in the narrative (which it is capable of satisfying by the very fact of its particularity). There are times when the film maker wants to distinguish clearly one sequence from a succeeding one. Common in its usage, this process is exceptional in its rule: it can be compared only to certain production credits (those mounted on title cards and not imposed on the image), to certain titles indicating major sections, and to the words "The End" (with the same restrictions). There are as many filmic moments during which the image track offers us no image. Again, in the latter examples, it offers us a written text. In the fade-out, it offers us nothing: the black rectangle is viewed far less as such than as a brief instant of filmic void. Such a diminution creates its own strength. This singular void on the screen, in a filmic universe normally so full and so dense, by its very singularity leads us to assume a strong separation between before and after. The fade-out is perhaps the only true "punctuation" mark which the cinema possesses to date. This is because it is *irregular* (as one says of a conjugation) and efficacious. And because it is efficacious, it has become habitual. Rare in the system, it is common in the text.

4. *Profilmic Trucages and Cinematographic Trucages*

There is another important distinction, this time concerning *trucages* only and not "syntactic" signs. The word "*trucage*" itself normally designates two kinds of interventions not situated at the same point in the total process of film making. The first, which I shall call *profilmic trucages* in the exact meaning given to that adjective by filmology,⁶ consists of a small machination which has been previously integrated into the action or into objects in front of which a camera has been placed. It is *before shooting* that something has been "tricked." These are ruses essentially analogous to those of conjurers. The specific codes of cinema play but a minor role here, even though films resort to them frequently. For tech-

6. *Profilmic* is everything placed in front of the camera (or in front of which it is placed) for the camera to "take."

nicians, these are *trucages* on the same order as others, since they must, like others, be specially prepared. Resorting to stunt men is a common example. The stunt man replaces the actor in certain scenes (difficult or dangerous acrobatics, for example). The film maker chooses a person of the same general appearance as the actor or actress; the wardrobe and makeup departments achieve the "resemblance"; the cameraman is careful to film him only at a certain distance and from certain angles.

Among the "tricks" of Geoge Méliès, many were not cinematographic but profilmic. Méliès did not make this distinction—conjurer of his craft, he considered even his cinematographic *trucages* to be merely temporary substitutes for his illusionist's ruses which various insufficiencies in the machinery of his theater had made impossible for a time.⁷ In 1896, when Méliès inaugurated the "disappearing trick" in *L'Escamotage d'une dame*—a matter of simply interrupting the shooting while the lady in question left the set—he opted for it reluctantly. This procedure replaced, in his eyes, the theater trapdoor which he lacked that year. If after 1900 Méliès' cinematographic invention slackened and lost its impetus, it is because his new studio was comprised of a perfected collection of theater apparatus. Jean Cocteau, for his part, has declared that in several of his films, notably in *Orphée* (France, 1950), he preferred older machinations to the *trucages* of cinema.⁸ Reflections in the mirror, for example, are "interpreted" by doubles.

In contrast to these profilmic *trucages* are those which belong specifically to cinema. They come into play at another point in the production of the film. They belong to the filming, not to the filmed. As I have said earlier, they are produced, according to the situation, during the shooting (= camera *trucages*) or after it (= track *trucages* produced in the laboratory). In any case, they are never shot beforehand. I have tried elsewhere to demonstrate that "cinematographic specificity" is a phenomenon which allows for degrees.⁹ Certain figures are more specific than others, which nevertheless remain so. This presence, at the very heart of the wholly specific domain (which is, in turn, merely a part of the film), of several *degrees of specificity*, can also be determined, among other things, in the case of *cinematographic trucages* (= non-profilmic *trucages*). The "blurred focus," for example, belongs in the category of filming, and not in the action filmed. It is thus "specific." And yet, blurred focus is a photographic technique which the cinema has been content to adopt. This is not to say that it is void of all specificity, since one of the characteristics belonging to cinematographic codes is the ability to integrate photographic codes. Nevertheless, blurred focus belongs less specifically to the cinema—since cinema shares it with a

7. Georges Sadoul, "Georges Méliès et la première élaboration du langage cinématographique," *Revue internationale de Filmologie* 1 (July–August 1947): 23–30.

8. *Entretiens autour du cinématographe*, ed. André Fraigneau (Paris, 1951), pp. 126–38.

9. Chap. 10 in *Langage et cinéma* (Paris, 1971).

number of other "languages"—than does, for example, accelerated motion. The latter assumes the multiplicity of photograms,* does not belong to photography, and is possible only in the cinema. In short, what is significant in profilmic *trucages* is the complete scale of different *trucages*, more or less cinematographic.

As for the optical effects reputed to have "syntactic" value and to participate in no way in *trucage*, it will be shown that they are never profilmic. The totally black screen, the dissolve, iris, wipes, the swish pan, etc., are all, to varying degrees, cinematographic processes which entail camera work or treatment of the celluloid. This is only logical, since we are dealing with enunciation markings which the cinema, in the course of its history, has gradually accumulated, and whose conscious finality excluded their intervention into the heart of filmed action. They belong to the narrative, not to the story; to the telling process, and not to the told. And yet we shall see that, despite this principle, the real working of the film often brings them into play, at least in part, for the benefit of the diegesis.

5. Imperceptible Trucages, Invisible Trucages, Visible Trucages

By its very contents, the distinction between profilmic and cinematographic belonged to the making of film. The next distinction, on the other hand, has to do with film "reading." At first glance, it seems to apply only to *trucages*, and yet film "reading" is what leads, by natural extension, to a return to the very distinction of *trucages* and syntactic processes.

In classical cinema (diegetic cinema), a detailed and coded procedure which is part of the *cinematographic establishment* prescribes the different types of relationships which the spectator can have with *trucages*. Here we are touching upon a real regulation of perception, in itself connected, as I would like to demonstrate, to the historical development of cinematographic *genres*.

Some *trucages* are imperceptible, while others are on the contrary meant to be discernible (accelerated motion, slow motion, etc.). *Imperceptible trucages*, moreover, must not be confused with *invisible trucages*. Resorting to a stunt man is an imperceptible *trucage*. We have seen the precautions taken by the film maker: if they are successful, the spectator will not notice that there has been a *trucage*. He may *know* it by having read of it in a film journal, but it is of little import, if he has not noticed it, whether he knows it or not (it is even better if he does know, as will be shown later). Imperceptible *trucage* is in complete compatibility with the

*I am retaining Metz's term, "*photogrammes*," by which he seems to mean "photographic recordings," that is, an individual frame blow up. [Translator's note]

convention, characteristic of the majority of present-day films, of a minimum degree of average realism—that is to say, within the limits of what is called the “realistic film.” If the actor is shorter than the actress (= films with Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman), he wears special shoes or is photographed only at planned angles. The shooting for the film *Crin blanc* (*White Mane*) by Albert Lamorisse (France, 1952), was done with three or four different horses, although it tells us the realistic story of a horse (only one, of course).

Invisible *trucage* is another matter. The spectator could not explain how it was produced nor at exactly which point in the filmic text it intervenes. It is invisible because we do not know where it is, because we do not *see* it (whereas we see a blurred focus or a superimposition). But it is perceptible, because we perceive its presence, because we “sense” it, and because that feeling may even be indispensable, according to the codes, to an accurate appreciation of the film. The same is true of the *trucages* used in the most successful films on “the invisible man.” These are very convincing *trucages*, impossible to localize, but the existence of which is beyond doubt and even creates one of the major interests of the film. They are *trucages* which everyone will agree are “well made” by virtue of their perfect quality (whereas a sequence with a stunt man is successful only if we do not suspect his intervention). The spectator who is accustomed to cinema, and who knows the rules of the game, has at his disposal three apprehensible systems which correspond respectively, in the film, to imperceptible *trucages*, visible *trucages*, and to perceptible but invisible *trucages*.

As to the punctuation marks, it will come as no surprise here to state that they all belong to the category of visible effects.

6. *Trucage as Avowed Machination*

Thus the indigenous theory of cinema reserves a special place for certain optical effects, turning them into rhetorical instruments, clauses of speech, thus escaping the universe of “*machination*.” Conversely, it is this “*machination*” which defines the official status of *trucage* in the cinematographic establishment. The result is that *trucage*, curiously enough, is *always avowed*. It is avowed in the film even in the case of invisible but perceptible *trucage* (and a fortiori in visible *trucage*). And if it is an imperceptible *trucage*, it avows itself, so to speak, in the periphery of the film, in its publicity, in the awaited commentaries which will emphasize the technical skill to which the imperceptible *trucage* owes its imperceptibility. (We will not be fooled by particular instances in which the publicity, at least the immediate publicity, remains silent about certain imperceptible *trucages*, the divulgence of which would be injurious to another publicity—to that of the actor, for example, if he is short, and

the film has made him artificially "taller." This is a temporary and timely silence which does not prevent the cinema, in its publicity as more loosely defined, from voluntarily emphasizing its machination abilities.)

There is then a certain duplicity attached to the very notion of *trucages*. There is always something hidden inside it (since it remains *trucage* only to the extent to which the perception of the spectator is taken by surprise), and at the same time, something which flaunts itself, since it is important that the powers of cinema be credited for this astonishing of the senses. Visible *trucage*, invisible *trucage*, and imperceptible *trucage* represent three types of solutions, three levels of balance between these two fundamental requirements.

7. Trucage as Diegetization Process

Syntactic markings are thus distinct from *trucages* because they are not, in theory, machinations. Further, the term "special effects" (the meaning of which is, moreover, fairly vague) is generally reserved for *trucages* and more often than not excludes rhetorical signals. And yet, the latter *are* special effects according to the definition given at the beginning of this text: process-effects which are particular and localized, which do not merge with the normal movement of the photograms, and which are visual but not photographic effects.

It is no doubt because of this technological affinity that *trucages* and enunciation markings are less easily distinguishable in practice than the theoretical bipartition proposed by the *vulgate* of cinematographic commentary on this subject would have us believe. The vulgate will tell us, for example, that a given "ripple effect" has the value of a syntagmatic signal of separation between "before" and "after," whereas such a deceleration is a *trucage* aimed at creating a dreamlike atmosphere. And it is true that, in certain cases, the difference is indeed clear (even though slow motion, by gradual conventionality, can also be viewed as the rhetorical sign of a passage into dream, thus avoiding the entire problem). But even if we admit this, and concede that the contrast is often quite clear and distinct, the fact remains that this is not always the case, nor has it always been so.

What is experienced as a simple figure of speech today was quite frequently, for the first spectators of the cinematograph, a magic "trick," a small miracle both futile and astonishing. It is known that Méliès developed a good portion of the optical effects still in use today, but he considered them "little magic formulas," and "pure abracadabras" (to return to Georges Sadoul's remarks,¹⁰ continued by Edgar Morin¹¹)

10. Sadoul, "Georges Méliès," p. 26.

11. *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* (Paris, 1956), pp. 57-63.

rather than as figures of language, as Jean Mitry has pointed out.¹² It took the force of habit and the progressive stabilization of the codes for certain *trucages* to cease being *trucages* (this is particularly clear in the case of the dissolve). This uncertainty of the diachrony is in part projected onto the synchronic level, at the very heart of contemporary cinema. When a dissolve occurs between two sequences for the purpose of concomitantly emphasizing their separation and deep kinship—since this is, in short, the signified of that “punctuation”—it is already a mark of transition (but still an *evocative* mark). If that same dissolve, this time drawn out with more insistence, superimposes, for a fairly lengthy period of time, the face of the dreaming hero and the representation of the subject of his dream—then the rhetorical indicator, already perceptible as such, emerges only with difficulty from a *trucage* enterprise, and the sequence retains something miraculous as well as a bit of magic. One more step backwards, and it will become the prolonged superimposition; still a *trucage*, and yet already bearing the beginnings of a *deixis* of enunciation, as in the sequence from *The Ballad of a Soldier* by Grigori Chukhraï (USSR, 1959), in which the young hero carries with him, in the train crossing a sad winter landscape, the wonderful memory of a few brief moments of happiness.

It is understandable that quite often optical effects reveal themselves to be hovering between the status of *trucage* and *clause*. Since they are not photographs, they are never “realistic.” They remain somewhat a divergence from the film (which is precisely why they are “special” processes). This divergence, more or less sensed, is interpreted (according to the context, the genre of the film: fantasy, burlesque, or on the contrary less marked by the fantastic, etc.) as either a leap into the unusual or as an indication of a metalinguistic order which helps to comprehend better the adjacent images.

In the sequence from *The Ballad of a Soldier*, the superimposition of the young girl’s face on a frozen landscape over railroad images attempts in no way to fool the spectator: it is clear that in “reality” (= that of the diegesis), the soldier is traveling on a train and mentally evoking the features of the young girl encountered shortly before. The same could be said on the subject of the famous sequence in accelerated motion in Eisenstein’s *The General Line* (USSR, 1929). The Kolkhozian girl and the worker have finally succeeded in shaking the bureaucracy out of its inertia and are on the verge of obtaining the signature necessary for buying their tractor. The governmental offices, which until then had been somnolent, nearly asleep, will suddenly become animated (thanks to the accelerated motion) by a feverish activity which results in the precious signature in the wink of an eye. But we are well aware that this is a caricature (as well as a convention characteristic of the burlesque

12. *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1963–65), 1:271–79.

genre), and that the governmental offices, even if appropriately solicited, as the film suggests they be, are not expected to work at such a pace in diegetic reality.

On the other hand, films on "the invisible man" (which often resort to another process effect, the black background with mattes) achieve their goal, when they do achieve it, by the extent to which the impression is conveyed that it is *in diegetic truth* the hero himself, albeit invisible, who is slowly turning the doorknob. The effect would fail if the idea of the optical process used were too clearly present in our minds, as is the case when the film is clumsy.

Trucage then exists only when there is *deceit*. We may agree to use this term when the spectator *ascribes to the diegesis the totality of the visual elements furnished him*. In films of the fantastic, the impression of unreality is convincing only if the public has the feeling of partaking, not of some plausible illustration of a process obeying a nonhuman logic, but of a series of disquieting or "impossible" events which nevertheless unfold before him in the guise of eventlike appearances. In the opposite case, the spectator undertakes a type of spontaneous sorting out of the visible material of which the filmic text is composed and ascribes only a portion of it to the diegesis. The services of the department of agriculture have worked more quickly because they were approached in an appropriate manner: this amounts to the diegesis. The film makes light of this sudden rapidity; ironically, it exaggerates it: here is the *intention*, which amounts to the enunciation. In the exact degree to which this perceptible bifurcation is maintained, the connotated will be unable to pass for denotated, and there is no *trucage*. The optical effect has not merged with the usual game of the photograms, the entire visual material has not been mistaken for the photographic, the diegetization has not been total.

8. *Trucage and Rhetorical Markings (Return): The Fluidity of Boundaries*

That is what explains, in many cases, why there has both been and not been *trucage*. The apprehensible segregation defined in an instant is neither rigorously maintained nor definitively abandoned. The spectator is not the victim of the machination to the point of being unaware that it exists, but he is not sufficiently conscious of it for it to lose its impact. The attitude of the spectator, whose credibility is divided, thus answers to that of the cinema, which I said presents its *trucages* as avowed machinations. It is a game at which the cinematographic establishment wins twofold: by the performance, in the extent to which the special effect, barely discernible as such, is credited to the diegesis (= weakening of the segregation, slippage into magic), and by the affirmation of its own power in the extent to which this process, fairly

distinct as process, is to the benefit of the discourse. Thus both the segregation and the rhetorical play are retained, and from this comes the love for cinema.

Now we can more readily understand why punctuations and other transitions are often hard to distinguish from *trucages*. It is not merely because they began as *trucages* in the history of cinema. Nor is it only because they have in common with *trucages*, from a technological point of view, the fact that they are special effects. It is also because the *trucages* themselves, on one of their facets (admission of enunciation), demonstrate an intrinsic kinship with the rhetorical markings and are only distinct from them, in synchrony, by the threshold which leads to the boundary. From avowed machination (*trucage*), we move to the purely syntactic figure when the avowal becomes sufficiently unambiguous for the machination to cease being one, and for the spectator, before this optical effect, to ascribe no part of it to the diegesis (this is the case in several dissolves which are conspicuous to mark the "chapter" boundaries). It remains then that it is the *absence of machination* which defines, in the face of *trucage*, the pure signal of transition. But it is rare for a signal of transition to be pure, without it involving a beginning (or an end) of *trucage*.

In the most successful films on "the invisible man," the most naive spectator—as long as he is accustomed to going to the movies—never loses sight of the fact—even in the midst of his passionate interest in the plot—that the images were of necessity obtained through some special technique. Conversely, in the sequence from *The General Line*, even the most critical and best-informed spectator will have the fleeting impression, in the midst of the thoughts which he sketches out concerning the film maker's writing, that the characters in the film are "really" moving as fast as he sees them move. The distancing, like the identification, is never total; it is one of the aspects of this "interfusion" of the real and the imaginary which has already been well analyzed by Edgar Morin in *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire*.

The "syntax" of film stays snared in the movements of the affectivity, and a miraculous *trucage* can become a convention at any moment in realistic cinema. The most captivating of fantasy films, the most amusing of burlesque films, offer us *trucages* which always remain more or less perceived as instruments of discourse, for that is in fact of what those genres are comprised. They can function as such only because they elicit a double and contradictory reaction in the public: a belief in the reality, wonderful or comical, of the events presented, and an interest in the tour de force of which the cinema demonstrates it is capable. These genres remain in fragile balance, one which can be destroyed at any time by tilting to either side. No doubt this explains in part why there are few good burlesque films, and even fewer good fantasy films.

In short, the rhetorical dimension is evident in *trucage* itself, which is

not *only* miraculous. On the other hand, the figure of speech is not only syntactic; it often encourages the process of diegetization. We noted earlier that the spectator of *The Ballad of a Soldier* is not expected to diegetize the content of the superimposition. He knows that the young girl is not in the train, that the soldier is there "for real," and that the optical effect serves to introduce, in a conventional manner, mental images in the representation of the diegesis. It is nevertheless obvious that this manner of introducing them (without denying their conventional aspect) is in no way the equivalent of a linguistic statement such as "In the train, the soldier thought about the young girl." This would have set a *representation of words* into action, in the Freudian sense, while superimposition proffers itself as a "representation of things." Moreover, the two images, diegetic and mental, are superimposed with no formal mark of differentiation, and in an identical "context" (= both are photographic). What is supposed to separate them in the eyes of clear logic—the opposition of the "real" to mental evocation—finds itself, by virtue of cinematographic process, subtly denied and blurred at the very instant which convention expressly indicates. The narrative exponent of the "passage to the interiority" is necessarily mirrored by more confused and deeper suggestions. From the first, it presents itself as a condensation of two faces, in which the soldier achieves his desire. It carries with it centuries of legends and stories about the telepathy of lovers, presence in absence, and the eyes of the soul. In this very way, it loses its syntactic purity and functions to inflate the diegesis. To varying degrees, this is the case for all signs of enunciation. Their eventual "purity" is merely an extreme case.

The other extreme case, one which takes us to the polar opposite (on the side of *trucage*, therefore), is that of imperceptible effects, of which I spoke earlier (stunt men, for example). It is no doubt the only case in which we do not have to ask ourselves to what extent the special intervention has been viewed as diegetic. At such a point, the cinematographic establishment prefers to *ensure* its power rather than to *display* it. The machination is at a maximum; confession at a minimum.

9. *The Denial of Perception at the Cinema*

In intermediary cases (which comprise the majority of *trucages* and a good portion of "syntactic" markings), the double game is only possible, from the spectator's point of view, in a psychic process somewhat similar to denial (or "traverse," in legal terms), which was described by Freud in relation to castration anxiety and the birth of fetishism. What we call the "spectator" of the film—the person viewing the film—is, in fact, not only the conscious *I* (which is in any case, as we know, subject to "cleaving"), but the person in his entirety. Logical thought constantly "de-

diegetizes" optical processes: it *knows* that the young girl in *The Ballad of a Soldier* (the object of desire) is not on the train. But at the same time another thought, more closely connected to primary processes and to the pleasure principle, is not informed of what the *I* knows, has not been notified (or refuses to be notified). It constantly diegetizes that which the clear consciousness grammaticizes at the same time. It should be noted that it has much at stake in this (after a secondary identification with the soldier, which the film *displays*, specularly). It wants the young girl to be on the train, and the film allows for precisely this, by means of the mental crutch of the superimposition (which "condenses" so effectively). Thus this presence can be hallucinated or dreamed.

The powers of the cinematographic establishment thus anticipate wishes which, for the spectator, are neither superficial nor transitory. Cinema, in turn, is strengthened all the more for it. The very possibility of constantly dividing one's credibility goes far to explain the hold which cinema has on the spectator. For him it represents the formation of a compromise, greatly beneficial, between a certain degree of retention of one's defenses and thus the avoidance of anxiety.

Reasons such as this largely explain individual phenomena of attachment to the cinema. This may result from an evolution which is mostly opaque and subtle (in which the creation of the compromise manifests part of the symptom); or, conversely, from the lucid elaboration of an "economy" which is the least terrible possible, once the integration capabilities of the super-ego are made supple, and the subject matter has made possible a minimal capacity to tolerate oneself. The latter case corresponds to the least obscure form of *cinephilia*, and further explains the tenacity of classical cinema, such as genre films which regulate pleasure with a complexity difficult to replace.

10. From Cinema Trucage to Cinema as Trucage

It will perhaps come as somewhat of a surprise that considerations of a fairly general nature have little by little followed an analysis of *trucages* and of punctuation marks—that is, very particular phenomena which occupy but a small portion of the textual fabric of the film. But these cases are in fact particular only in the extent to which they draw particular attention to two facts which are not in themselves particular but which help to define cinema as a whole: the role of avowed machination in the cinematographic establishment and that of the denial of perception in the "spectatorial" economy.

It is in fact essential to know that cinema in its entirety is, in a sense, a vast *trucage*, and that the position of *trucage*, with respect to the whole of the text, is very different in cinema than it is in photography. It is a difference which, in the last analysis, insists that cinema be founded

upon *several* photographs, making the "shots" file by at the interior of the film and the photograms at the interior of the plot.

It is an abrupt undertaking to trick a photograph (a unique and, moreover, a permanent one), for the representation which it renders of its object is reputedly rigorously analogous and draws from this its specific system of social function. But we can already see what is lacking in a photograph: for the most part, the syntactic exponents of discourse, so numerous in cinema. Certainly, the angles, the distance of the camera, the lighting, etc., comprise a subjective interpretation of the object photographed, and society readily admits that other "treatments" would have been possible for the same objects. But this interpretation, as Roland Barthes has clearly shown,¹³ is experienced culturally as distinct connotation and is unrelated to denotation—that is, to the object represented, equivalent to the diegesis in regular photography. Everything occurs as though the rules of the game invited the spectator of a photograph to effect a distinct, apprehensible dichotomy between the intentions of the photographer (always more or less recognizable as such, so that there can never be *trucage*), and the photographic representation itself, theoretically strictly faithful since it was obtained, so to speak, in one stroke. The spectator somewhat succeeds in rediscovering, *under* the coefficient of enunciation from which he makes the mental subtraction, this "brutal, frontal, clear (even utopic) photograph" of which Roland Barthes speaks. Common sentiment dictates that the denotation may not be *constructed*, and that everything which is constructed be connotation.

This is why it is difficult (not technically, but psychologically, deontologically) to trick a photograph. The photographer only has the choice between a "normal" shot—which, even if pushed to the limit, cannot be tricked because the ideal denoted will find a way of passing unharmed through all the effects which simply ornament it—and, if he really wants to fool his audience, the characteristic lie, the fraudulent practice, such as those in photographic "montages"—skillful collages from two different angles, used by dishonest politicians in order to discredit their adversaries surprised in some compromising situation by the "objective" eye. Photographic *trucage* must be a brazen *falsehood*, or not be at all. It is forced to intervene crudely into the very heart of photographed action, since the photograph is supposed to refer *as a whole* to a real spectacle which it reproduces in a unified fashion, thus leaving no flaw, no crack to allow for the chance of a fine *trucage*, for a half-*trucage*.

On the other hand, cinema manages a great number of such interstices, sowing them at every step. Each sequence from "shot" to "shot"—or from photogram to photogram, if we take into consideration accelerations or retardations of slight amplitude—offers the opportunity of sliding in between the compact but disjointed pavement produced by

13. "Rhétorique de l'image," *Communications* 4 (1964): 40–51.

analogous codings, the skills of a subtle and permanent *trucage*, which is here customary. It has no need to extend itself to the point of lying in order to achieve its efficacy, since it can play on the multiplicity of the photographs and the links between them, the existence of which is avowed and *moral*. The denotation is no longer a combined one; it proffers itself as a construct (here is one of the great semiological differences between cinema and the photo); there is no longer an assumed gap interposed between the denotated and the connotated, and we may progress with ease and without discontinuity from the simple discursive intention (which the spectator will nevertheless partially ascribe to the diegesis) to the beginnings of *trucage*. Here the spectator will be only partially duped.

Montage itself, at the base of all cinema, is already a perpetual *trucage*, without being reduced to the *false* in usual cases. If several successive images represent one place at different angles, the spectator, victim of "*trucage*," will spontaneously perceive that place as unitary, since it is precisely his perception which will have reconstructed the unity. Here the *trucage* stems from a *projection*, another aspect of analogous construction, of the construction of the represented. It is a construction in the film as well as in the mind of the spectator. But at the same time, the latter will not be unaware that he has seen several photographs. He will not have been fooled. Today we are so accustomed to montage that it would occur to no one to add to the list of *trucages* (or "special" effects) such an ordinary and general manipulation. But montage—which remains the *trucage* prototype in photography, a significant point—was mentioned in 1912, in a book by Ducom on cinematic technique, as the most elementary of *trucages*. This explains why imperceptible *trucages* are the only pure *trucages*. Only with these can we be certain that the spectator has been fooled, since he has noticed nothing. As soon as we approach the vast domain of perceptible interventions, *trucage* and language become no more than two poles situated at the extremities of a common and continuous axis. They are distinct one from the other by their gravitational center, but not by their boundaries.

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The difference just discussed between cinema and photography has a paradoxical aspect. It would indeed seem that our culture grants to cinema a *reality quota* far superior to that granted the photograph. For is not cinema capable of "reproducing life" in a manner far more complete—far more "alive," as we say, not coincidentally—than photography? But it must be remembered that the social function of these two

languages stems, not only from their alleged relationship to "reality," but as much from their respective positions in terms of the historical tradition of representational art (epic, classical novel, subject painting, theatre of intrigue, etc.). Cinema—precisely because it abounds in signs of reality, and because these can work for the benefit of the fiction—integrated itself into the tradition with little effort. Too vulnerable, too "poor," photography has largely remained on the periphery. A significant part of its uses emerges in this respect as "nonartistic": identification photos, family photos, illustrations for technical books of all kinds, archive photos, etc. The social image of the photo is deeply affected by these and carries with it the odor of vital statistics, from which cinema is exempt.

Photography does not dispose of a power of reality sufficiently prestigious to be assigned the job, considered more elevated, of imaginative fiction. Nevertheless, it is granted (still mythically), in a movement which can be read as a need for a type of compensation, a sort of fierce *integrity* (even though one without sparkle) by the literal respect for this same reality. It is this reputation as untreatable which reduces the trickster to a counterfeiter. Cinema, on the other hand, enjoys in the public eye that type of half-fascinated indulgence which the misogynist feels for women, and which we bestow more generally upon all those from whom we do not expect total honesty, and who can afford a certain duplicity without falling into disrepute. Here we rediscover the avowed machination of which I spoke earlier. The cinema became a representational art; culture has legitimized—as occurred in the past with the novel or with painting—its games on the fiction of reality and the reality of fiction. Cinema thus has social "facilities" like those of heirs; facilities not enjoyed by photography.

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That is not all. Technologies also play a weighty role in this problem. The technologies of cinema and those of photography are frankly very close, since the second is in fact a part of the first and since, more fundamentally, they both produce analogous codings in which resemblance is developed, and consequently the impression of non-coding. The difference between them lies mainly in their degree of complexity. But it is an important difference. Photographic coding is relatively simple and compact: it is a strong mechanism, which can be subtly or poorly adjusted only with great difficulty, and which can be counterfeited only by an intervention of sufficient brutality to reveal a distortion of the natural course of events. The mechanism of cinema, though of an analogous model, possesses a far greater number of distinct coding pro-

cesses, interlinked by a complex tapestry of connections. Each photogram is a photograph, but succeeds the preceding one only through the intervention of a "blackness," the duration of which is material for decision (and today has changed from the silent film). These photograms are themselves grouped into bundles (the "shots"), whose concatenation creates a choice every time (straight cut, optical effect, etc.). It is a mechanism of great precision, whose power of resemblance continues to grow, but from which also grows, concomitantly, a vulnerability to slight distortion—merely the other face of numerous, necessary adjustments.

This point should be substantiated in more depth. But I will illustrate it here merely by noting the remarkable character of cinematographic *trucages*: none of them ever entirely "tricks" that which it tricks. A freeze frame, which alters normal movement, leaves the photographicity intact. The blurred focus, which destroys visual adaptation, does not modify the respective positions of objects in space. A backwards motion respects a type of specular principle in the temporal order. Mattes and counter-mattes leave untricked photographic spaces. Slow motion, which cheats with the acceptable speed of the track, alters neither the form nor the direction of movement, and so on.

Here we are touching upon a problem which has recently been the subject of great controversy. Jean Patrick Lebel has written a book about it—a book whose argument is compelling, and which contains certain elaborations which seem to me both solid and convincing.¹⁴ And yet I disagree with one of the central theses of the work: it seems to me that *le technique* [sic] does not outline a type of enclave sheltered from history. It is true that *le technique*, by its very function, proves the scientific truth (nonideological) of principles which are at its basis. But the *how* of its functioning (= adjustment of the machine), not to be confused with its *why*, is in no way controlled by science, and involves options which can only be sociocultural. *Le technique* is far from leaving culture aside. Certain technologies—by the very play of their technical nature—lend themselves to interventions whose historical determinations leave no room for doubt. It is not even necessary to be a Marxist in order to be convinced of this; one need but look around.

Conclusion: Cinema, in What History?

At the horizon of all of these problems, we are forced to wonder about the exact nature of the relationships, both real and little known, which the cinematographic establishment—and not only *commercial cinema*—has with ideology in general. To what extent is that establishment determined by its desire to lure the customer, by its search for

14. *Cinéma et idéologie* (Paris, 1971).

profit and thus by the economic system (or by its survival in other systems)? To what extent is it tied to the event, itself historic and yet displaced in the chronology of economic systems, which make possible the emergence of the representational arts, as well as the very existence of a diegesis? And finally, to what extent is the whole of cinema merely one of the inventions through which man tries to respond to the insistent goals proposed to him by his narcissism, vested in the playful form of a perceptual *aesthesia*—one which is nevertheless susceptible, as well, to being caught in the temporality of a story, but one which would then make for a third story?